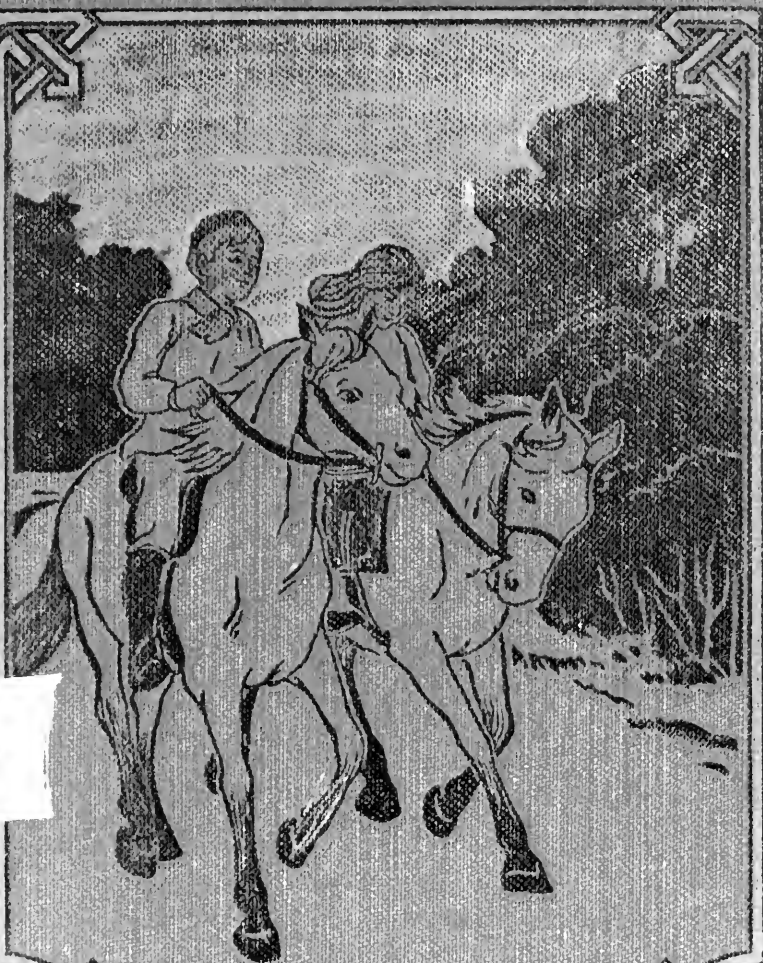


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BEARS
and
DACOITS

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BEARS AND DACOITS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

G. A. HENTY

Author of "With Buller in Natal" "Out with Garibaldi" "For Name and Fame".
"The Bravest of the Brave" &c. &c.

*WITH COLOURED FRONTISPIECE
AND SEVEN FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS*

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CONTENTS

	Page
BEARS AND DACOITS	7
WHITE-FACED DICK	43
A BRUSH WITH THE CHINESE.	66

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
"A SMALL CROWD SOON GATHERED ROUND THE CAGE"	
<i>Frontis.</i>	92
"MY HUNTING-KNIFE WAS OUT, AND I HAD THE BEAST BY THE THROAT"	19
"THERE WERE ONLY TWO GUARDS AND MYSELF ON THE ROCK PLATEAU"	29
"A STRONG ROPE WAS TIED TO THE CLOTH"	39
"DICK . . . STARTED ON FOOT WITH A SHOVEL ON HIS SHOULDER"	51
"THE BOY STILL GRASPED THE HANDLES"	61
"AT THE HEAD OF HIS MEN HE RUSHED IN AT THE ENTRANCE"	83
"JACK SCRAMBLED OUT"	101

BEARS AND DACOITS

A TALE OF THE GHATS

CHAPTER I

A MERRY party were sitting in the verandah of one of the largest and handsomest bungalows of Poonah. It belonged to Colonel Hastings, colonel of a native regiment stationed there, and at present, in virtue of seniority, commanding a brigade. Tiffin was on, and three or four officers and four ladies had taken their seats in the comfortable cane lounging-chairs which form the invariable furniture of the verandah of a well-ordered bungalow. Permission had been duly asked, and granted by Mrs. Hastings, and the cheroots had just begun to draw, when Miss Hastings, a niece of the colonel, who had only arrived the previous week from England, said,—

“Uncle, I am quite disappointed. Mrs. Lyons

showed me the bear she has got tied up in their compound, and it is the most wretched little thing, not bigger than Rover, papa's retriever, and it's full-grown. I thought bears were great fierce creatures, and this poor little thing seemed so restless and unhappy that I thought it quite a shame not to let it go."

Colonel Hastings smiled rather grimly.

"And yet, small and insignificant as that bear is, my dear, it is a question whether he is not as dangerous an animal to meddle with as a man-eating tiger."

"What, that wretched little bear, Uncle?"

"Yes, that wretched little bear. Any experienced sportsman will tell you that hunting those little bears is as dangerous a sport as tiger-hunting on foot, to say nothing of tiger-hunting from an elephant's back, in which there is scarcely any danger whatever. I can speak feelingly about it, for my career was pretty nearly brought to an end by a bear, just after I entered the army, some thirty years ago, at a spot within a few miles from here. I have got the scars on my shoulder and arm still."

"Oh, do tell me all about it," Miss Hastings said; and the request being seconded by the rest of the party, none of whom, with the exception of

Mrs. Hastings, had ever heard the story before—for the colonel was somewhat chary of relating this special experience—he waited till they had all drawn up their chairs as close as possible, and then giving two or three vigorous puffs at his cheroot, began as follows:—

“Thirty years ago, in 1855, things were not so settled in the Deccan as they are now. There was no idea of insurrection on a large scale, but we were going through one of those outbreaks of Dacoity, which have several times proved so troublesome. Bands of marauders kept the country in confusion, pouring down on a village, now carrying off three or four of the Bombay money-lenders, who were then, as now, the curse of the country; sometimes making an onslaught upon a body of traders; and occasionally venturing to attack small detachments of troops or isolated parties of police. They were not very formidable, but they were very troublesome, and most difficult to catch, for the peasantry regarded them as patriots, and aided and shielded them in every way. The head-quarters of these gangs of Dacoits were the Ghauts. In the thick bush and deep valleys and gorges there they could always take refuge, while sometimes the more daring chiefs converted these detached peaks and masses of

rock, numbers of which you can see as you come up the Ghaut by railway, into almost impregnable fortresses. Many of these masses of rock rise as sheer up from the hillside as walls of masonry, and look at a short distance like ruined castles. Some are absolutely inaccessible; others can only be scaled by experienced climbers; and, although possible for the natives with their bare feet, are impracticable to European troops. Many of these rock fortresses were at various times the headquarters of famous Dacoit leaders, and unless the summits happened to be commanded from some higher ground within gunshot range they were all but impregnable except by starvation. When driven to bay, these fellows would fight well.

“Well, about the time I joined, the Dacoits were unusually troublesome; the police had a hard time of it, and almost lived in the saddle, and the cavalry were constantly called up to help them, while detachments of infantry from the station were under canvas at several places along the top of the Ghauts to cut the bands off from their strongholds, and to aid, if necessary, in turning them out of their rock fortresses. The natives in the valleys at the foot of the Ghauts, who have always been a semi-independent race, ready to rob whenever they saw a chance, were

great friends with the Dacoits, and supplied them with provisions whenever the hunt on the Deccan was too hot for them to make raids in that direction.

“This is a long introduction, you will say, and does not seem to have much to do with bears; but it is really necessary, as you will see. I had joined about six months when three companies of the regiment were ordered to relieve a wing of the 15th, who had been under canvas at a village some four miles to the north of the point where the line crosses the top of the Ghauts. There were three white officers, and little enough to do, except when a party was sent off to assist the police. We had one or two brushes with the Dacoits, but I was not out on either occasion. However, there was plenty of shooting, and a good many pigs about, so we had very good fun. Of course, as a raw hand, I was very hot for it, and as the others had both passed the enthusiastic age, except for pig-sticking and big game, I could always get away. I was supposed not to go far from camp, because, in the first place, I might be wanted; and, in the second, because of the Dacoits; and Norworthy, who was in command, used to impress upon me that I ought not to go beyond the sound of a bugle. Of course we both knew

that if I intended to get any sport I must go further afoot than this; but I merely used to say 'All right, sir, I will keep an ear to the camp,' and he on his part never considered it necessary to ask where the game which appeared on the table came from. But in point of fact, I never went very far, and my servant always had instructions which way to send for me if I was wanted; while as to the Dacoits I did not believe in their having the impudence to come in broad daylight within a mile or two of our camp. I did not often go down the face of the Ghauts. The shooting was good, and there were plenty of bears in those days, but it needed a long day for such an expedition, and in view of the Dacoits who might be scattered about, was not the sort of thing to be undertaken except with a strong party. Norworthy had not given any precise orders about it, but I must admit that he said one day:—

“Of course you won't be fool enough to think of going down the Ghauts, Hastings?’ But I did not look at that as equivalent to a direct order—whatever I should do now,” the colonel put in, on seeing a furtive smile on the faces of his male listeners.

“However, I never meant to go down, though I used to stand on the edge and look longingly

down into the bush and fancy I saw bears moving about in scores. But I don't think I should have gone into their country if they had not come into mine. One day the fellow who always carried my spare gun or flask, and who was a sort of shekarry in a small way, told me he had heard that a farmer, whose house stood near the edge of the Ghauts, some two miles away, had been seriously annoyed by his fruit and corn being stolen by bears.

“‘I'll go and have a look at the place to-morrow,’ I said; ‘there is no parade, and I can start early. You may as well tell the mess cook to put up a basket with some tiffin and a bottle of claret, and get a boy to carry it over.’

“‘The bears not come in day,’ Rahman said.

“‘Of course not,’ I replied; ‘still I may like to find out which way they come. Just do as you are told.’

“The next morning, at seven o'clock, I was at the farmer's spoken of, and there was no mistake as to the bears. A patch of Indian corn had been ruined by them, and two dogs had been killed. The native was in a terrible state of rage and alarm. He said that on moonlight nights he had seen eight of them, and they came and sniffed around the door of the cottage.

“‘Why don’t you fire through the window at them?’ I asked scornfully, for I had seen a score of tame bears in captivity, and, like you, Mary, was inclined to despise them, though there was far less excuse for me; for I had heard stories which should have convinced me that, small as he is, the Indian bear is not a beast to be attacked with impunity. Upon walking to the edge of the Ghauts there was no difficulty in discovering the route by which the bears came up to the farm. For a mile to the right and left the ground fell away as if cut with a knife, leaving a precipice of over a hundred feet sheer down; but close by where I was standing was the head of a water-course, which in time had gradually worn a sort of cleft in the wall, up or down which it was not difficult to make one’s way. Further down this little gorge widened out and became a deep ravine, and further still a wide valley, where it opened upon the flats far below us. About half a mile down where the ravine was deepest and darkest was a thick clump of trees and jungle.

“‘That’s where the bears are?’ I asked Rahman. He nodded. It seemed no distance. I could get down and back in time for tiffin, and perhaps bag a couple of bears. For a young sportsman the temptation was great. ‘How long would it

take us to go down and have a shot or two at them?’

“‘No good go down. Master come here at night, shoot bears when they come up.’

“I had thought of that; but, in the first place, it did not seem much sport to shoot the beasts from cover when they were quietly eating, and, in the next place, I knew that Norworthy could not, even if he were willing, give me leave to go out of camp at night. I waited, hesitating for a few minutes, and then I said to myself, ‘It is of no use waiting. I could go down and get a bear and be back again while I am thinking of it;’ then to Rahman, ‘No, come along; we will have a look through that wood anyhow.’

“Rahman evidently did not like it.

“‘Not easy find bear, sahib. He very cunning.

“‘Well, very likely we sha’n’t find them,’ I said, ‘but we can try anyhow. Bring that bottle with you; the tiffin basket can wait here till we come back.’ In another five minutes I had begun to climb down the watercourse—the shekarry following me. I took the double-barrelled rifle and handed him the shot-gun, having first dropped a bullet down each barrel over the charge. The ravine was steep, but there were bushes to hold on by, and although it was hot work and took

a good deal longer than I expected, we at last got down to the place which I had fixed upon as likely to be the bears' home.

"‘Sahib, climb up top,’ Rahman said; ‘come down through wood; no good fire at bear when he above.’

"I had heard that before; but I was hot, the sun was pouring down, there was not a breath of wind, and it looked a long way up to the top of the wood.

"‘Give me the claret. It would take too long to search the wood regularly. We will sit down here for a bit, and if we can see anything moving up in the wood, well and good; if not, we will come back again another day with some beaters and dogs.’ So saying, I sat down with my back against a rock, at a spot where I could look up among the trees for a long way through a natural vista. I had a drink of claret, and then I sat and watched till gradually I dropped off to sleep. I don't know how long I slept, but it was some time, and I woke up with a sudden start. Rahman, who had, I fancy, been asleep too, also started up.

"The noise which had aroused us was made by a rolling stone striking a rock; and looking up I saw some fifty yards away, not in the wood, but on the rocky hillside on our side of the

ravine, a bear standing, as though unconscious of our presence, snuffing the air. As was natural, I seized my rifle, cocked it, and took aim, unheeding a cry of 'No, no, sahib,' from Rahman. However, I was not going to miss such a chance as this, and I let fly. The beast had been standing sideways to me, and as I saw him fall I felt sure I had hit him in the heart. I gave a shout of triumph, and was about to climb up, when, from behind the rock on which the bear had stood, appeared another growling fiercely; on seeing me, it at once prepared to come down. Stupidly, being taken by surprise, and being new at it, I fired at once at its head. The bear gave a spring, and then—it seemed instantaneous—down it came at me. Whether it rolled down, or slipped down, or ran down, I don't know, but it came almost as if it had jumped straight at me.

"'My gun, Rahman,' I shouted, holding out my hand. There was no answer. I glanced round, and found that the scoundrel had bolted. I had time, and only just time, to take a step backwards, and to club my rifle, when the brute was upon me. I got one fair blow at the side of its head, a blow that would have smashed the skull of **any** civilized beast into pieces, and which did.

fortunately break the brute's jaw; then in an instant he was upon me, and I was fighting for life. My hunting-knife was out, and with my left hand I had the beast by the throat; while with my right I tried to drive my knife into its ribs. My bullet had gone through his chest. The impetus of his charge had knocked me over, and we rolled on the ground, he tearing with his claws at my shoulder and arm, I stabbing and struggling, my great effort being to keep my knees up so as to protect my body with them from his hind claws. After the first blow with his paw, which laid my shoulder open, I do not think I felt any special pain whatever. There was a strange faint sensation, and my whole energy seemed centered in the two ideas—to strike and to keep my knees up. I knew that I was getting faint, but I was dimly conscious that his efforts, too, were relaxing. His weight on me seemed to increase enormously, and the last idea that flashed across me was that it was a drawn fight.

“The next idea of which I was conscious was that I was being carried. I seemed to be swinging about, and I thought I was at sea. Then there was a little jolt and a sense of pain. ‘A collision,’ I muttered, and opened my eyes. Beyond the fact that I seemed in a yellow world—



"MY HUNTING-KNIFE WAS OUT, AND I HAD THE BEAST
BY THE THROAT"

a bright orange-yellow—my eyes did not help me, and I lay vaguely wondering about it all, till the rocking ceased. There was another bump, and then the yellow world seemed to come to an end; and as the daylight streamed in upon me I fainted again. This time when I awoke to consciousness things were clearer. I was stretched by a little stream. A native woman was sprinkling my face and washing the blood from my wounds; while another, who had with my own knife cut off my coat and shirt, was tearing the latter into strips to bandage my wounds. The yellow world was explained. I was lying on the yellow robe of one of the women. They had tied the ends together, placed a long stick through them, and carried me in the bag-like hammock. They nodded to me when they saw I was conscious, and brought water in a large leaf, and poured it into my mouth. Then one went away for some time, and came back with some leaves and bark. These they chewed and put on my wounds, bound them up with strips of my shirt, and then again knotted the ends of the cloth, and lifting me up, went on as before.

“I was sure that we were much lower down the Ghaut than we had been when I was watching for the bears, and we were now going still

lower. However, I knew very little Hindustani, nothing of the language the women spoke. I was too weak to stand, too weak even to think much; and I dozed and woke, and dozed again, until, after what seemed to me many hours of travel, we stopped again, this time before a tent. Two or three old women and four or five men came out, and there was great talking between them and the young women—for they were young—who had carried me down. Some of the party appeared angry; but at last things quieted down, and I was carried into the tent. I had fever, and was, I suppose, delirious for days. I afterwards found that for fully a fortnight I had lost all consciousness; but a good constitution and the nursing of the women pulled me round. When once the fever had gone, I began to mend rapidly. I tried to explain to the women that if they would go up to the camp and tell them where I was they would be well rewarded; but although I was sure they understood, they shook their heads, and by the fact that as I became stronger two or three armed men always hung about the tent, I came to the conclusion that I was a sort of prisoner. This was annoying, but did not seem serious. If these people were Dacoits, or, as was more likely, allies of the Dacoits, I could be kept only

for ransom or exchange. Moreover, I felt sure of my ability to escape when I got strong, especially as I believed that in the young women who had saved my life, both by bringing me down and by their careful nursing, I should find friends."

"Were they pretty, uncle?" Mary Hastings broke in.

"Never mind whether they were pretty, Mary; they were better than pretty."

"No; but we like to know, uncle."

"Well, except for the soft, dark eyes, common to the race, and the good temper and lightheartedness, also so general among Hindu girls, and the tenderness which women feel towards a creature whose life they have saved, whether it is a wounded bird or a drowning puppy, I suppose they were nothing remarkable in the way of beauty, but at the time I know that I thought them charming.

CHAPTER II.

JUST as I was getting strong enough to walk, and was beginning to think of making my escape, a band of five or six fellows, armed to the teeth, came in, and made signs that I was to go with them. It was evidently an arranged thing,

the girls only were surprised, but they were at once turned out, and as we started I could see two crouching figures in the shade with their cloths over their heads. I had a native garment thrown over my shoulders, and in five minutes after the arrival of the fellows found myself on my way. It took us some six hours before we reached our destination, which was one of those natural rock citadels. Had I been in my usual health I could have done the distance in an hour and a half, but I had to rest constantly, and was finally carried rather than helped up. I had gone not unwillingly, for the men were clearly, by their dress, Dacoits of the Deccan, and I had no doubt that it was intended either to ransom or exchange me.

“At the foot of this natural castle were some twenty or thirty more robbers, and I was led to a rough sort of arbour in which was lying, on a pile of maize straw, a man who was evidently their chief. He rose and we exchanged salaams.

“‘What is your name, sahib?’ he asked in Mahratta.

“‘Hastings—Lieutenant Hastings,’ I said. And yours?’

“‘Sivajee Punt!’ he said.

“This was bad. I had fallen into the hands of

the most troublesome, most ruthless, and most famous of the Dacoit leaders. Over and over again he had been hotly chased, but had always managed to get away; and when I last heard anything of what was going on four or five troops of native police were scouring the country after him. He gave an order which I did not understand, and a wretched Bombay writer, I suppose a clerk of some money-lender, was dragged forward. Sivajee Punt spoke to him for some time, and the fellow then told me in English that I was to write at once to the officer commanding the troops, telling him that I was in his hands, and should be put to death directly he was attacked.

“‘Ask him,’ I said, ‘if he will take any sum of money to let me go?’

“Sivajee shook his head very decidedly.

“A piece of paper was put before me, and a pen and ink, and I wrote as I had been ordered, adding, however, in French, that I had brought myself into my present position by my own folly, and would take my chance, for I well knew the importance which Government attached to Sivajee’s capture. I read out loud all that I had written in English, and the interpreter translated it. Then the paper was folded and I addressed it, ‘The Officer Commanding,’ and I was given

some chupattis and a drink of water, and allowed to sleep. The Dacoits had apparently no fear of any immediate attack.

"It was still dark, although morning was just breaking, when I was awakened, and was got up to the citadel. I was hoisted rather than climbed, two men standing above with a rope, tied round my body, so that I was half-hauled, half-pushed up the difficult places, which would have taxed all my climbing powers had I been in health.

"The height of this mass of rock was about a hundred feet; the top was fairly flat, with some depressions and risings, and about eighty feet long by fifty wide. It had evidently been used as a fortress in ages past. Along the side facing the hill were the remains of a rough wall. In the centre of a depression was a cistern, some four feet square, lined with stone-work, and in another depression a gallery had been cut, leading to a subterranean store-room or chamber. This natural fortress rose from the face of the hill at a distance of a thousand yards or so from the edge of the plateau, which was fully two hundred feet higher than the top of the rock. In the old days it would have been impregnable, and even at that time it was an awkward place to

take, for the troops were armed only with Brown Bess, and rifled cannon were not thought of. Looking round, I could see that I was some four miles from the point where I had descended. The camp was gone; but running my eye along the edge of the plateau I could see the tops of tents a mile to my right, and again two miles to my left; turning round, and looking down into the wide valley, I saw a regimental camp.

"It was evident that a vigorous effort was being made to surround and capture the Dacoits, since troops had been brought up from Bombay. In addition to the troops above and below, there would probably be a strong police force, acting on the face of the hill. I did not see all these things at the time, for I was, as soon as I got to the top, ordered to sit down behind the parapet, a fellow armed to the teeth squatting down by me, and signifying that if I showed my head above the stones he would cut my throat without hesitation. There were, however, sufficient gaps between the stones to allow me to have a view of the crest of the Ghaut, while below my view extended down to the hills behind Bombay. It was evident to me now why the Dacoits did not climb up into the fortress. There were dozens of similar crags on the face of the Ghauts, and the

troops did not as yet know their whereabouts. It was a sort of blockade of the whole face of the hills which was being kept up, and there were, probably enough, several other bands of Dacoits lurking in the jungle.

“There were only two guards and myself on the rock plateau. I discussed with myself the chances of my overpowering them and holding the top of the rock till help came; but I was greatly weakened, and was not a match for a boy, much less for the two stalwart Mahrattas; besides, I was by no means sure that the way I had been brought up was the only possible path to the top. The day passed off quietly. The heat on the bare rock was frightful, but one of the men, seeing how weak and ill I really was, fetched a thick rug from the storehouse, and with the aid of a stick made a sort of lean-to against the wall, under which I lay sheltered from the sun.

“Once or twice during the day I heard a few distant musket-shots, and once a sharp heavy outburst of firing. It must have been three or four miles away, but it was on the side of the Ghaut, and showed that the troops or police were at work. My guards looked anxiously in that direction, and uttered sundry curses. When



"THERE WERE ONLY TWO GUARDS AND MYSELF ON THE
ROCK PLATEAU"

it was dusk, Sivajee and eight of the Dacoits came up. From what they said, I gathered that the rest of the band had dispersed, trusting either to get through the line of their pursuers, or, if caught, to escape with slight punishment, the men who remained being too deeply concerned in murderous outrages to hope for mercy. Sivajee himself handed me a letter, which the man who had taken my note had brought back in reply. Major Knapp, the writer, who was the second in command, said that he could not engage the Government, but that if Lieutenant Hastings was given up the act would certainly dispose the Government to take the most merciful view possible; but that if, on the contrary, any harm was suffered by Lieutenant Hastings, every man taken would be at once hung. Sivajee did not appear put out about it. I do not think he expected any other answer, and imagine that his real object in writing was simply to let them know that I was a prisoner, and so enable him the better to paralyse the attack upon a position which he no doubt considered all but impregnable.

"I was given food, and was then allowed to walk as I chose upon the little plateau, two of the Dacoits taking post as sentries at the steepest

part of the path, while the rest gathered, chatting and smoking, in the depression in front of the storehouse. It was still light enough for me to see for some distance down the face of the rock, and I strained my eyes to see if I could discern any other spot at which an ascent or descent was possible. The prospect was not encouraging. At some places the face fell sheer away from the edge, and so evident was the impracticability of escape that the only place which I glanced at twice was the western side, that is the one away from the hill. Here it sloped gradually for a few feet. I took off my shoes and went down to the edge. Below, some ten feet, was a ledge, on to which with care I could get down, but below that was a sheer fall of some fifty feet. As a means of escape it was hopeless, but it struck me that if an attack was made I might slip away and get on to the ledge. Once there I could not be seen except by a person standing where I now was, just on the edge of the slope, a spot to which it was very unlikely that anyone would come.

"The thought gave me a shadow of hope, and, returning to the upper end of the platform, I lay down, and in spite of the hardness of the rock, was soon asleep. The pain of my aching bones

woke me up several times, and once, just as the first tinge of dawn was coming, I thought I could hear movements in the jungle. I raised myself somewhat, and I saw that the sounds had been heard by the Dacoits, for they were standing listening, and some of them were bringing spare fire-arms from the storehouse, in evident preparation for attack.

"As I afterwards learned, the police had caught one of the Dacoits trying to effect his escape, and by means of a little of the ingenious torture to which the Indian police then frequently resorted, when their white officers were absent, they obtained from him the exact position of Sivajee's band, and learned the side from which the ascent must be made. That the Dacoit and his band were still upon the slopes of the Ghauts they knew, and were gradually narrowing their circle, but there were so many rocks and hiding-places that the process of searching was a slow one, and the intelligence was so important that the news was off at once to the colonel, who gave orders for the police to surround the rock at daylight and to storm it if possible. The garrison was so small that the police were alone ample for the work, supposing that the natural difficulties were not altogether insuperable.

"Just at daybreak there was a distant noise of men moving in the jungle, and the Dacoit half-way down the path fired his gun. He was answered by a shout and a volley. The Dacoits hurried out from the chamber, and lay down on the edge, where, sheltered by a parapet, they commanded the path. They paid no attention to me, and I kept as far away as possible. The fire began—a quiet, steady fire, a shot at a time, and in strong contrast to the rattle kept up from the surrounding jungle; but every shot must have told, as man after man who strove to climb that steep path, fell. It lasted only ten minutes, and then all was quiet again.

"The attack had failed, as I knew it must do, for two men could have held the place against an army; a quarter of an hour later a gun from the crest above spoke out, and a round shot whistled above our heads. Beyond annoyance, an artillery fire could do no harm, for the party could be absolutely safe in the store cave. The instant the shot flew overhead, however, Sivajee Punt beckoned to me, and motioned me to take my seat on the wall facing the guns. Hesitation was useless, and I took my seat with my back to the Dacoits and my face to the hill. One of the Dacoits, as I did so, pulled off the native

cloth which covered my shoulders, in order that I might be clearly seen.

"Just as I took my place another round shot hummed by; but then there was a long interval of silence. With a field-glass every feature must have been distinguishable to the gunners, and I had no doubt that they were waiting for orders as to what to do next.

"I glanced round and saw that with the exception of one fellow squatted behind the parapet some half-dozen yards away, clearly as a sentry to keep me in place, all the others had disappeared. Some, no doubt, were on sentry down the path, the others were in the store beneath me. After half an hour's silence the guns spoke out again. Evidently the gunners were told to be as careful as they could, for some of the shots went wide on the left, others on the right. A few struck the rock below me. The situation was not pleasant, but I thought that at a thousand yards they ought not to hit me, and I tried to distract my attention by thinking out what I should do under every possible contingency.

"Presently I felt a crash and a shock, and fell backwards to the ground. I was not hurt, and on picking myself up saw that the ball had struck

the parapet to the left, just where my guard was sitting, and he lay covered with its fragments. His turban lay some yards behind him. Whether he was dead or not I neither knew nor cared.

"I pushed down some of the parapet where I had been sitting, dropped my cap on the edge outside, so as to make it appear that I had fallen over, and then picking up the man's turban, ran to the other end of the platform and scrambled down to the ledge. Then I began to wave my arms about—I had nothing on above the waist—and in a moment I saw a face with a uniform cap peer out through the jungle, and a hand was waved. I made signs to him to make his way to the foot of the perpendicular wall of rock beneath me. I then unwound the turban, whose length was, I knew, amply sufficient to reach to the bottom, and then looked round for something to write on. I had my pencil still in my trousers pocket, but not a scrap of paper.

"I picked up a flattish piece of rock and wrote on it, 'Get a rope-ladder quickly, I can haul it up. Ten men in garrison. They are all under cover. Keep on firing to distract their attention.'

"I tied the stone to the end of the turban, and looked over. A non-commissioned officer of the police was already standing below. I lowered

the stone; he took it, waved his hand to me, and was gone.

"An hour passed: it seemed an age. The round shots still rang overhead, and the fire was now much more heavy and sustained than before. Presently I again saw a movement in the jungle, and Norworthy's face appeared, and he waved his arm in greeting.

"Five minutes more and a party were gathered at the foot of the rock, and a strong rope was tied to the cloth. I pulled it up. A rope-ladder was attached to it, and the top rung was in a minute or two in my hands. To it was tied a piece of paper with the words: 'Can you fasten the ladder?' I wrote on the paper: 'No; but I can hold it for a light weight.'

"I put the paper with a stone in the end of the cloth, and lowered it again. Then I sat down, tied the rope round my waist, got my feet against two projections, and waited. There was a jerk, and then I felt some one was coming up the rope-ladder. The strain was far less than I expected, but the native policeman who came up first did not weigh half so much as an average Englishman. There were now two of us to hold. The officer in command of the police came up next, then Norworthy, then a dozen more police. I

explained the situation, and we mounted to the upper level. Not a soul was to be seen. Quickly we advanced and took up a position to command the door of the underground chamber; while one of the police waved a white cloth from his bayonet as a signal to the gunners to cease firing. Then the police officer hailed the party within the cave.

“Sivajee Punt! you may as well come out and give yourself up! We are in possession, and resistance is useless!”

“A yell of rage and surprise was heard, and the Dacoits, all desperate men, came bounding out, firing as they did so. Half of their number were shot down at once, and the rest, after a short, sharp struggle, were bound hand and foot.

“That is pretty well all of the story, I think. Sivajee Punt was one of the killed. The prisoners were all either hung or imprisoned for life. I escaped my blowing-up for having gone down the Ghauts after the bear, because, after all, Sivajee Punt might have defied their force for months had I not done so.

“It seemed that that scoundrel Rahman had taken back word that I was killed. Nor-worthy had sent down a strong party, who



"A STRONG ROPE WAS TIED TO THE CLOTH"

found the two dead bears, and who, having searched everywhere without finding any signs of my body, came to the conclusion that I had been found and carried away, especially as they ascertained that natives used that path. They had offered rewards, but nothing was heard of me till my note saying I was in Sivajee's hands arrived."

"And did you ever see the women who carried you off?"

"No, Mary, I never saw them again. I did, however, after immense trouble, succeed in finding out where it was that I had been taken to. I went down at once, but found the village deserted. Then after much inquiry I found where the people had moved to, and sent messages to the women to come up to the camp, but they never came; and I was reduced at last to sending them down two sets of silver bracelets, necklaces, and bangles, which must have rendered them the envy of all the women on the Ghauts. They sent back a message of grateful thanks, and I never heard of them afterwards. No doubt their relatives, who knew that their connection with the Dacoits was now known, would not let them come. However, I had done all I could, and I have no doubt the women were perfectly

satisfied. So you see, my dear, that the Indian bear, small as he is, is an animal which it is as well to leave alone, at any rate when he happens to be up on the side of a hill while you are at the foot."

WHITE-FACED DICK

A STORY OF PINE-TREE GULCH

HOW Pine-tree Gulch got its name no one knew, for in the early days every ravine and hillside was thickly covered with pines. It may be that a tree of exceptional size caught the eye of the first explorer, that he camped under it, and named the place in its honour; or, may be, some fallen giant lay in the bottom and hindered the work of the first prospectors. At any rate, Pine-tree Gulch it was, and the name was as good as any other. The pine-trees were gone now. Cut up for firing, or for the erection of huts, or the construction of sluices, but the hillside was ragged with their stumps.

The principal camp was at the mouth of the Gulch, where the little stream, which scarce

afforded water sufficient for the cradles in the dry season, but which was a rushing torrent in winter, joined the Yuba. The best ground was at the junction of the streams, and lay, indeed, in the Yuba valley rather than in the Gulch. At first most gold had been found higher up, but there was here comparatively little depth down to the bed-rock, and as the ground became exhausted the miners moved down towards the mouth of the Gulch. They were doing well as a whole, how well no one knew, for miners are chary of giving information as to what they are making; still, it was certain they were doing well, for the bars were doing a roaring trade, and the store-keepers never refused credit—a proof in itself that the prospects were good.

The flat at the mouth of the Gulch was a busy scene, every foot was good paying stuff, for in the eddy, where the torrents in winter rushed down into the Yuba, the gold had settled down and lay thick among the gravel. But most of the parties were sinking, and it was a long way down to the bed-rock; for the hills on both sides sloped steeply, and the Yuba must here at one time have rushed through a narrow gorge, until, in some

wild freak, it brought down millions of tons of gravel, and resumed its course seventy feet above its former level.

A quarter of a mile higher up a ledge of rock ran across the valley, and over it in the old time the Yuba had poured in a cascade seventy feet deep into the ravine. But the rock now was level with the gravel, only showing its jagged points here and there above it. This ledge had been invaluable to the diggers: without it they could only have sunk their shafts with the greatest difficulty, for the gravel would have been full of water, and even with the greatest pains in puddling and timber-work the pumps would scarcely have sufficed to keep it down as it rose in the bottom of the shafts. But the miners had made common cause together, and giving each so many ounces of gold or so many day's work had erected a dam thirty feet high along the ledge of rock, and had cut a channel for the Yuba along the lower slopes of the valley. Of course, when the rain set in, as everybody knew, the dam would go, and the river diggings must be abandoned till the water subsided and a fresh dam was made; but there were two months before them yet, and

every one hoped to be down to the bed-rock before the water interrupted their work.

The hillside, both in the Yuba Valley and for some distance along Pine-tree Gulch, was dotted by shanties and tents; the former constructed for the most part of logs roughly squared, the walls being some three feet in height, on which the sharp sloping roof was placed, thatched in the first place with boughs, and made all snug, perhaps, with an old sail stretched over all. The camp was quiet enough during the day. The few women were away with their washing at the pools, a quarter of a mile up the Gulch, and the only persons to be seen about were the men told off for cooking for their respective parties.

But in the evening the camp was lively. Groups of men in red shirts and corded trousers tied at the knee, in high boots, sat round blazing fires, and talked of their prospects or discussed the news of the luck at other camps. The sound of music came from two or three plank erections which rose conspicuously above the huts of the diggers, and were bright externally with the glories of white and coloured paints. To and from these men were always sauntering, and it

needed not the clink of glasses and the sound of music to tell that they were the bars of the camp.

Here, standing at the counter, or seated at numerous small tables, men were drinking villainous liquor, smoking and talking, and paying but scant attention to the strains of the fiddle or the accordion, save when some well-known air was played, when all would join in a boisterous chorus. Some were always passing in or out of a door which led into a room behind. Here there was comparative quiet, for men were gambling, and gambling high.

Going backwards and forwards with liquors into the gambling-room of the Imperial Saloon, which stood just where Pine-tree Gulch opened into Yuba valley, was a lad, whose appearance had earned for him the name of White-faced Dick.

White-faced Dick was not one of those who had done well at Pine-tree Gulch; he had come across the plains with his father, who had died when half-way over, and Dick had been thrown on the world to shift for himself. Nature had not intended him for the work, for he was a delicate, timid lad; what spirits he originally had

having been years before beaten out of him by a brutal father. So far, indeed, Dick was the better rather than the worse for the event which had left him an orphan.

They had been travelling with a large party for mutual security against Indians and Mormons, and so long as the journey lasted Dick had got on fairly well. He was always ready to do odd jobs, and as the draught cattle were growing weaker and weaker, and every pound of weight was of importance, no one grudged him his rations in return for his services; but when the company began to descend the slopes of the Sierra Nevada they began to break up, going off by twos and threes to the diggings, of which they heard such glowing accounts. Some, however, kept straight on to Sacramento, determining there to obtain news as to the doings at all the different places, and then to choose that which seemed to offer the best prospects of success.

Dick proceeded with them to the town, and there found himself alone. His companions were absorbed in the busy rush of population, and each had so much to provide and arrange for, that none gave a thought to the solitary boy. How-

ever, at that time no one who had a pair of hands, however feeble, to work need starve in Sacramento; and for some weeks Dick hung around the town doing odd jobs, and then, having saved a few dollars, determined to try his luck at the diggings, and started on foot with a shovel on his shoulder and a few day's provisions slung across it.

Arrived at his destination, the lad soon discovered that gold-digging was hard work for brawny and seasoned men, and after a few feeble attempts in spots abandoned as worthless he gave up the effort, and again began to drift; and even in Pine-tree Gulch it was not difficult to get a living. At first he tried rocking cradles, but the work was far harder than it appeared. He was standing ankle deep in water from morning till night, and his cheeks grew paler, and his strength, instead of increasing, seemed to fade away. Still, there were jobs within his strength. He could keep a fire alight and watch a cooking-pot, he could carry up buckets of water or wash a flannel shirt, and so he struggled on, until at last some kind-hearted man suggested to him that he should try to get a place at the new saloon which was about to be opened.

"You are not fit for this work, young 'un, and you ought to be at home with your mother; if you like I will go up with you this evening to Jeffries. I knew him down on the flats, and I daresay he will take you on. I don't say as a saloon is a good place for a boy, still you will always get your bellyful of victuals and a dry place to sleep in, if it's only under a table. What do you say?"

Dick thankfully accepted the offer, and on Red George's recommendation was that evening engaged. His work was not hard now, for till the miners knocked off there was little doing in the saloon; a few men would come in for a drink at dinner-time, but it was not until the lamps were lit that business began in earnest, and then for four or five hours Dick was busy.

A rougher or healthier lad would not have minded the work, but to Dick it was torture; every nerve in his body thrilled whenever rough miners cursed him for not carrying out their orders more quickly, or for bringing them the wrong liquors, which, as his brain was in a whirl with the noise, the shouting, and the multiplicity of orders, happened frequently. He might have



"DICK . . . STARTED ON FOOT WITH A SHOVEL
ON HIS SHOULDER"

fared worse had not Red George always stood his friend, and Red George was an authority in Pine-tree Gulch—powerful in frame, reckless in bearing and temper, he had been in a score of fights and had come off them, if not unscathed, at least victorious. He was notoriously a lucky digger, but his earnings went as fast as they were made, and he was always ready to open his belt and give a bountiful pinch of dust to any mate down on his luck.

One evening Dick was more helpless and confused than usual. The saloon was full, and he had been shouted at and badgered and cursed until he scarcely knew what he was doing. High play was going on in the saloon, and a good many men were clustered round the table. Red George was having a run of luck, and there was a big pile of gold dust on the table before him. One of the gamblers who was losing had ordered old rye, and instead of bringing it to him, Dick brought a tumbler of hot liquor which someone else had called for. With an oath the man took it up and threw it in his face.

"You cowardly hound!" Red George exclaimed. "Are you man enough to do that to a man?"

"You bet," the gambler, who was a new arrival at Pine-tree Gulch, replied; and picking up an empty glass, he hurled it at Red George. The by-standers sprang aside, and in a moment the two men were facing each other with outstretched pistols. The two reports rung out simultaneously: Red George sat down unconcernedly with a streak of blood flowing down his face, where the bullet had cut a furrow in his cheek; the stranger fell back with the bullet hole in the centre of his forehead.

The body was carried outside, and the play continued as if no interruption had taken place. They were accustomed to such occurrences in Pine-tree Gulch, and the piece of ground at the top of the hill, that had been set aside as a burial place, was already dotted thickly with graves, filled in almost every instance by men who had died, in the local phraseology, "with their boots on."

Neither then nor afterwards did Red George allude to the subject to Dick, whose life after this signal instance of his championship was easier than it had hitherto been, for there were few in Pine-tree Gulch who cared to excite Red George's

anger; and strangers going to the place were sure to receive a friendly warning that it was best for their health to keep their tempers over any shortcomings on the part of White-faced Dick.

Grateful as he was for Red George's interference on his behalf, Dick felt the circumstance which had ensued more than anyone else in the camp. With others it was the subject of five minutes' talk, but Dick could not get out of his head the thought of the dead man's face as he fell back. He had seen many such frays before, but he was too full of his own troubles for them to make much impression upon him. But in the present case he felt as if he himself was responsible for the death of the gambler; if he had not blundered this would not have happened. He wondered whether the dead man had a wife and children, and, if so, were they expecting his return? Would they ever hear where he had died and how?

But this feeling, which, tired out as he was when the time came for closing the bar, often prevented him from sleeping for hours, in no way lessened his gratitude and devotion towards Red

George, and he felt that he could die willingly if his life would benefit his champion. Sometimes he thought, too, that his life would not be much to give, for in spite of shelter and food, the cough which he had caught while working in the water still clung to him, and, as his employer said to him angrily one day—

“Your victuals don’t do you no good, Dick; you get thinner and thinner, and folks will think as I starve you. Darned if you ain’t a disgrace to the establishment.”

The wind was whistling down the gorges, and the clouds hung among the pine-woods which still clothed the upper slopes of the hills, and the diggers, as they turned out one morning, looked up apprehensively.

“But it could not be,” they assured each other. Every one knew that the rains were not due for another month yet; it could only be a passing shower if it rained at all.

But as the morning went on, men came in from camps higher up the river, and reports were current that it had been raining for the last two days among the upper hills; while those who took the trouble to walk across to the new channel could

see for themselves at noon that it was filled very nigh to the brim, the water rushing along with thick and turbid current. But those who repeated the rumours, or who reported that the channel was full, were summarily put down. Men would not believe that such a calamity as a flood and the destruction of all their season's work could be impending. There had been some showers, no doubt, as there had often been before, but it was ridiculous to talk of anything like rain a month before its time. Still, in spite of these assertions, there was uneasiness at Pine-tree Gulch, and men looked at the driving clouds above and shook their heads before they went down to the shafts to work after dinner.

When the last customer had left and the bar was closed, Dick had nothing to do till evening, and he wandered outside and sat down on a stump, at first looking at the work going on in the valley, then so absorbed in his own thoughts that he noticed nothing, not even the driving mist which presently set in. He was calculating that he had, with his savings from his wages and what had been given him by the miners, laid by eighty dollars. When he got another hundred and

twenty he would go; he would make his way down to San Francisco, and then by ship to Panama and up to New York, and then west again to the village where he was born. There would be people there who would know him, and who would give him work, for his mother's sake. He did not care what it was; anything would be better than this.

Then his thoughts came back to Pine-tree Gulch, and he started to his feet. Could he be mistaken? Were his eyes deceiving him? No; among the stones and boulders of the old bed of the Yuba there was the gleam of water, and even as he watched it he could see it widening out. He started to run down the hill to give the alarm, but before he was half-way he paused, for there were loud shouts, and a scene of bustle and confusion instantly arose.

The cradles were deserted, and the men working on the surface loaded themselves with their tools and made for the high ground, while those at the windlasses worked their hardest to draw up their comrades below. A man coming down from above stopped close to Dick, with a low cry, and stood gazing with a white scared face. Dick:

had worked with him; he was one of the company to which Red George belonged.

"What is it, Saunders?"

"My God! they are lost," the man replied. "I was at the windlass when they shouted up to me to go up and fetch them a bottle of rum. They had just struck it rich, and wanted a drink on the strength of it."

Dick understood at once. Red George and his mates were still in the bottom of the shaft, ignorant of the danger which was threatening them.

"Come on," he cried; "we shall be in time yet," and at the top of his speed dashed down the hill, followed by Saunders.

"What is it, what is it?" asked parties of men mounting the hill. "Red George's gang are still below."

Dick's eyes were fixed on the water. There was a broad band now of yellow with a white edge down the centre of the stony flat, and it was widening with terrible rapidity. It was scarce ten yards from the windlass at the top of Red George's shaft when Dick, followed closely by Saunders, reached it.

"Come up, mates; quick, for your lives! The

river is rising; you will be flooded out directly. Every one else has gone!"

As he spoke he pulled at the rope by which the bucket was hanging, and the handles of the windlass flew round rapidly as it descended. When it had run out, Dick and he grasped the handles.

"All right below?"

An answering call came up, and the two began their work, throwing their whole strength into it. Quickly as the windlass revolved, it seemed an endless time to Dick before the bucket came up, and the first man stepped out. It was not Red George. Dick had hardly expected it would be. Red George would be sure to see his two mates up before him, and the man uttered a cry of alarm as he saw the water, now within a few feet of the mouth of the shaft.

It was a torrent now, for not only was it coming through the dam, but it was rushing down in cascades from the new channel. Without a word the miner placed himself facing Dick and the moment the bucket was again down, the three grasped the handles. But quickly as they worked, the edge of the water was within a few inches of the shaft when the next man reached



"THE BOY STILL GRASPED THE HANDLES"



the surface; but again the bucket descended before the rope tightened. However, the water had begun to run over the lip—at first in a mere trickle, and then, almost instantaneously, in a cascade, which grew larger and larger.

The bucket was half-way up when a sound like thunder was heard, the ground seemed to tremble under their feet, and then at the turn of the valley above, a great wave of yellow water, crested with foam, was seen tearing along at the speed of a race-horse.

“The dam has burst!” Saunders shouted. “Run for your lives, or we are all lost!”

The three men dropped the handles and ran at full speed towards the shore, while loud shouts to Dick to follow came from the crowd of men standing on the slope. But the boy still grasped the handles, and with lips tightly closed, still toiled on. Slowly the bucket ascended, for Red George was a heavy man; then suddenly the weight slackened, and the handle went round faster. The shaft was filling, the water had reached the bucket, and had risen to Red George’s neck, so that his weight was no longer on the rope. So fast did the water pour in, that it was not half a minute before

the bucket reached the surface, and Red George sprang out. There was but time for one exclamation, and then the great wave struck them. Red George was whirled like a straw in the current; but he was a strong swimmer, and at a point where the valley widened out, half a mile lower, he struggled to shore.

Two days later the news reached Pine-tree Gulch that a boy's body had been washed ashore twenty miles down, and ten men, headed by Red George, went and brought it solemnly back to Pine-tree Gulch. There, among the stumps of pine-trees, a grave was dug, and there, in the presence of the whole camp, White-faced Dick was laid to rest.

Pine-tree Gulch is a solitude now, the trees are growing again, and none would dream that it was once a busy scene of industry; but if the traveller searches among the pine-trees, he will find a stone with the words:

"Here lies White-faced Dick, who died to save Red George. 'What can a man do more than give his life for a friend?'"

The text was the suggestion of an ex-clergyman working as a miner in Pine-tree Gulch.

Red George worked no more at the diggings, but after seeing the stone laid in its place, went east, and with what little money came to him when the common fund of the company was divided after the flood on the Yuba, bought a small farm, and settled down there; but to the end of his life he was never weary of telling those who would listen to it the story of Pine-tree Gulch.

A BRUSH WITH THE CHINESE

AND WHAT CAME OF IT

IT was early in December that H.M.S. *Perseus* was cruising off the mouth of the Canton River. War had been declared with China in consequence of her continued evasions of the treaty she had made with us, and it was expected that a strong naval force would soon gather to bring her to reason. In the meantime the ships on the station had a busy time of it, chasing the enemy's junks when they ventured to show themselves beyond the reach of the guns of their forts, and occasionally having a brush with the piratical boats which took advantage of the general confusion to plunder friend as well as foe.

The *Perseus* had that afternoon chased two Government junks up a creek. The sun had

already set when they took refuge there, and the captain did not care to send his boats after them in the dark, as many of the creeks ran up for miles into the flat country; and as they not unfrequently had many arms or branches, the boats might, in the dark, miss the junks altogether. Orders were issued that four boats should be ready for starting at daybreak the next morning. The *Perseus* anchored off the mouth of the creek, and two boats were ordered to row backwards and forwards off its mouth all night to insure that the enemy did not slip out in the darkness.

Jack Fothergill, the senior midshipman, was commanding the gig, and two of the other midshipmen were going in the pinnace and launch, commanded respectively by the first lieutenant and the master. The three other midshipmen of the *Perseus* were loud in their lamentations that they were not to take share in the fun.

"You can't all go, you know," Fothergill said, "and it's no use making a row about it; the captain has been very good to let three of us go."

"It's all very well for you, Jack," Percy Adcock, the youngest of the lads, replied, "be-

cause you are one of those chosen; and it is not so hard for Simmons and Linthorpe, because they went the other day in the boat that chased those junks under shelter of the guns of their battery, but I haven't had a chance for ever so long."

"What fun was there in chasing the junks?" Simmons said. "We never got near the brutes till they were close to their battery, and then just as the first shot came singing from their guns, and we thought that we were going to have some excitement, the first lieutenant sung out 'Easy all,' and there was nothing for it but to turn round and to row for the ship, and a nice hot row it was—two hours and a half in a broiling sun. Of course I am not blaming Oliphant, for the captain's orders were strict that we were not to try to cut the junks out if they got under the guns of any of their batteries. Still it was horribly annoying, and I do think the captain might have remembered what beastly luck we had last time, and given us a chance to-morrow."

"It is clear we could not all go," Fothergill said, "and naturally enough the captain chose

the three seniors. Besides, if you did have bad luck last time, you had your chance, and I don't suppose we shall have anything more exciting now; these fellows always set fire to their junks and row for the shore directly they see us, after firing a shot or two wildly in our direction."

"Well, Jack, if you don't expect any fun," Simmons replied, "perhaps you wouldn't mind telling the first lieutenant you do not care for going, and that I am very anxious to take your place. Perhaps he will be good enough to allow me to relieve you."

"A likely thing that!" Fothergill laughed. "No, Tom, I am sorry you are not going, but you must make the best of it till another chance comes."

"Don't you think, Jack," Percy Adcock said to his senior in a coaxing tone later on, "you could manage to smuggle me into the boat with you?"

"Not I, Percy. Suppose you got hurt, what would the captain say then? And firing as wildly as the Chinese do, a shot is just as likely to hit your little carcass as to lodge in one of the sailors. No, you must just make the best of it

Percy, and I promise you that next time there is a boat expedition, if you are not put in, I will say a good word to the first luff for you."

"That promise is better than nothing," the boy said; "but I would a deal rather go this time and take my chance next."

"But you see you can't, Percy, and there's no use talking any more about it. I really do not expect there will be any fighting. Two junks would hardly make any opposition to the boats of the ship, and I expect we shall be back by nine o'clock with the news that they were well on fire before we came up."

Percy Adcock, however, was determined, if possible, to go. He was a favourite among the men, and when he spoke to the bow oar of the gig, the latter promised to do anything he could to aid him to carry out his wishes.

"We are to start at daybreak, Tom, so that it will be quite dark when the boats are lowered. I will creep into the gig before that and hide myself as well as I can under your thwart, and all you have got to do is to take no notice of me. When the boat is lowered I think they will hardly make me out from the deck, especially as

you will be standing up in the bow holding on with the boat-hook till the rest get on board."

"Well, sir, I will do my best; but if you are caught you must not let out that I knew anything about it."

"I won't do that," Percy said. "I don't think there is much chance of my being noticed until we get on board the junks, and then they won't know which boat I came off in, and the first lieutenant will be too busy to blow me up. Of course I shall get it when I am on board again, but I don't mind that so that I see the fun. Besides, I want to send home some things to my sister, and she will like them all the better if I can tell her I captured them on board some junks we seized and burnt."

The next morning the crews mustered before daybreak. Percy had already taken his place under the bow thwart of the gig. The davits were swung overboard, and two men took their places in her as she was lowered down by the falls. As soon as she touched the water the rest of the crew clambered down by the ladder and took their places; then Fothergill took his seat in the stern, and the boat pushed off and lay a

few lengths away from the ship until the heavier boats put off. As soon as they were under way Percy crawled out from his hiding-place and placed himself in the bow, where he was sheltered by the body of the oarsmen from Fothergill's sight.

Day was just breaking now, but it was still dark on the water, and the boat rowed very slowly until it became lighter. Percy could just make out the shores of the creek on both sides; they were but two or three feet above the level of the water, and were evidently submerged at high tide. The creek was about a hundred yards wide, and the lad could not see far ahead, for it was full of sharp windings and turnings. Here and there branches joined it, but the boats were evidently following the main channel. After another half-hour's rowing the first lieutenant suddenly gave the order, "Easy all," and the men, looking over their shoulders, saw a village a quarter of a mile ahead, with the two junks they had chased the night before lying in front of it. Almost at the same moment a sudden uproar was heard—drums were beaten and gongs sounded.

"They are on the look-out for us," the first

lieutenant said. "Mr. Mason, do you keep with me and attack the junk highest up the river; Mr. Bellew and Mr. Fothergill, do you take the one lower down. Row on, men."

The oars all touched the water together, and the four boats leapt forward. In a minute a scattering fire of gingals and matchlocks was opened from the junks, and the bullets pattered on the water round the boats. Percy was kneeling up in the bow now. As they passed a branch channel three or four hundred yards from the village, he started and leapt to his feet.

"There are four or five junks in that passage, Fothergill; they are poling out."

The first lieutenant heard the words.

"Row on, men; let us finish with these craft ahead before the others get out. This must be that piratical village we have heard about, Mr. Mason, as lying up one of these creeks; that accounts for those two junks not going higher up. I was surprised at seeing them here, for they might guess that we should try to get them this morning. Evidently they calculated on catching us in a trap."

Percy was delighted at finding that, in the

excitement caused by his news, the first lieutenant had forgotten to take any notice of his being there without orders, and he returned a defiant nod to the threat conveyed by Fothergill shaking his fist at him. As they neared the junks the fire of those on board redoubled, and was aided by that of many villagers gathered on the bank of the creek. Suddenly from a bank of rushes four cannons were fired. A ball struck the pinnacle, smashing in her side. The other boats gathered hastily round and took her crew on board, and then dashed at the junks, which were but a hundred yards distant. The valour of the Chinese evaporated as they saw the boats approaching, and scores of them leapt overboard and swam for shore.

In another minute the boats were alongside and the crews scrambling up the sides of the junks. A few Chinamen only attempted to oppose them. These were speedily overcome, and the British had now time to look round, and saw that six junks crowded with men had issued from the side creek and were making towards them.

"Let the boats tow astern," the lieutenant

ordered. "We should have to run the gauntlet of that battery on shore if we were to attack them, and might lose another boat before we reached their side. We will fight them here."

The junks approached, those on board firing their guns, yelling and shouting, while the drums and gongs were furiously beaten.

"They will find themselves mistaken, Percy, if they think they are going to frighten us with all that row," Fothergill said. "You young rascal, how did you get on board the boat without being seen? The captain will be sure to suspect I had a hand in concealing you."

The tars were now at work firing the gingals attached to the bulwarks and the matchlocks, with which the deck was strewn, at the approaching junks. As they took steady aim, leaning their pieces on the bulwarks, they did considerable execution among the Chinamen crowded on board the junks, while the shot of the Chinese, for the most part, whistled far overhead; but the guns of the shore battery, which had now been slewed round to bear upon them, opened with a better aim, and several shots came crashing into the sides of the two captured junks.

"Get ready to board, lads!" Lieutenant Oliphant shouted. "Don't wait for them to board you, but the moment they come alongside lash their rigging to ours and spring on board them."

The leading junk was now about twenty yards away, and presently grated alongside. Half-a-dozen sailors at once sprang into her rigging with ropes, and after lashing the junks together leaped down upon her deck, where Fothergill was leading the gig's crew and some of those rescued from the pinnace, while Mr. Bellev, with another party, had boarded her at the stern. Several of the Chinese fought stoutly, but the greater part lost heart at seeing themselves attacked by the "white devils," instead of, as they expected, overwhelming them by their superior numbers. Many began at once to jump overboard, and after two or three minutes' sharp fighting, the rest either followed their example or were beaten below.

Fothergill looked round. The other junk had been attacked by two of the enemy, one on each side, and the little body of sailors were gathered in her waist, and were defending themselves against an overwhelming number of the enemy

The other three piratical junks had been carried somewhat up the creek by the tide that was sweeping inward, and could not for the moment take part in the fight.

"Mr. Oliphant is hard pressed, sir." He asked the master: "Shall we take to the boats?"

"That will be the best plan," Mr. Bellew replied. "Quick, lads, get the boats alongside and tumble in; there is not a moment to be lost."

The crew at once sprang to the boats and rowed to the other junk, which was but some thirty yards away.

The Chinese, absorbed in their contest with the crew of the pinnace, did not perceive the new-comers until they gained the deck, and with a shout fell furiously upon them. In their surprise and consternation the pirates did not pause to note that they were still five to one superior in number, but made a precipitate rush for their own vessels. The English at once took the offensive. The first lieutenant with his party boarded one, while the new-comers leapt on to the deck of the other. The panic which had seized the Chinese was so complete that they attempted no resist-

ance whatever, but sprang overboard in great numbers and swam to the shore, which was but twenty yards away, and in three minutes the English were in undisputed possession of both vessels.

"Back again, Mr. Fothergill, or you will lose the craft you captured," Lieutenant Oliphant said; "they have already cut her free."

The Chinese, indeed, who had been beaten below by the boarding party, had soon perceived the sudden departure of their captors, and gaining the deck again had cut the lashings which fastened them to the other junk, and were proceeding to hoist their sails. They were too late, however. Almost before the craft had way on her Fothergill and his crew were alongside. The Chinese did not wait for the attack, but at once sprang overboard and made for the shore. The other three junks, seeing the capture of their comrades, had already hoisted their sails and were making up the creek. Fothergill dropped an anchor, left four of his men in charge, and rowed back to Mr. Oliphant.

"What shall we do next, sir?"

"We will give those fellows on shore a lesson,

and silence their battery. Two men have been killed since you left. We must let the other junks go for the present. Four of my men were killed and eleven wounded before Mr. Bellew and you came to our assistance. The Chinese were fighting pluckily up to that time, and it would have gone very hard with us if you had not been at hand; the beggars will fight when they think they have got it all their own way. But before we land we will set fire to the five junks we have taken. Do you return and see that the two astern are well lighted, Mr. Fothergill; Mr. Mason will see to these three. When you have done your work take to your boat and lay off till I join you; keep the junks between you and the shore, to protect you from the fire of the rascals there."

"I cannot come with you, I suppose, Fothergill?" Percy Adcock said, as the midshipman was about to descend into his boat again.

"Yes, come along, Percy. It doesn't matter what you do now. The captain will be so pleased when he hears that we have captured and burnt five junks, that you will get off with a very light wiggling, I imagine."

"That's just what I was thinking, Jack. Has it not been fun?"

"You wouldn't have thought it fun if you had got one of those matchlock balls in your body. There are a good many of our poor fellows just at the present moment who do not see anything funny in the affair at all. Here we are; clamber up."

The crew soon set to work under Fothergill's orders. The sails were cut off the masts and thrown down into the hold; bamboos, of which there were an abundance down there, were heaped over them, a barrel of oil was poured over the mass, and the fire then applied.

"That will do, lads. Now take to your boats and let's make a bonfire of the other junk."

In ten minutes both vessels were a sheet of flame, and the boat was lying a short distance from them waiting for further operations. The inhabitants of the village, furious at the failure of the plan which had been laid for the destruction of the "white devils," kept up a constant fusilade, which, however, did no harm, for the gig was completely sheltered by the burning junks close to her from their missiles.

"There go the others!" Percy exclaimed after a minute or two, as three columns of smoke arose simultaneously from the other junks, and the sailors were seen dropping into their boats alongside.

The killed and wounded were placed in the other gig with four sailors in charge. They were directed to keep under shelter of the junks until rejoined by the pinnace and Fothergill's gig, after these had done their work on shore.

When all was ready the first lieutenant raised his hand as a signal, and the two boats dashed between the burning junks and rowed for the shore. Such of the natives as had their weapons charged fired a hasty volley, and then, as the sailors leapt from their boats, took to their heels.

"Mr. Fothergill, take your party into the village and set fire to the houses; shoot down every man you see. This place is a nest of pirates. I will capture that battery and then join you."

Fothergill and his sailors at once entered the village. The men had already fled; the women were turned out of the houses, and these were immediately set on fire. The tars regarded the

whole affair as a glorious joke, and raced from house to house, making a hasty search in each for concealed valuables before setting it on fire. In a short time the whole village was in a blaze.

"There is a house there, standing in that little grove a hundred yards away," Percy said.

"It looks like a temple," Fothergill replied. "However, we will have a look at it." And calling two sailors to accompany him, he started at a run towards it, Percy keeping by his side.

"It is a temple," Fothergill said when they approached it. "Still, we will have a look at it, but we won't burn it; it will be as well to respect the religion, even of a set of piratical scoundrels like these."

At the head of his men he rushed in at the entrance. There was a blaze of fire as half a dozen muskets were discharged in their faces. One of the sailors dropped dead, and before the others had time to realize what had happened they were beaten to the ground by a storm of blows from swords and other weapons.

A heavy blow crashed down on Percy's head, and he fell insensible even before he realized what had occurred.



"AT THE HEAD OF HIS MEN HE RUSHED IN AT THE ENTRANCE."

When he recovered, his first sensation was that of a vague wonder as to what had happened to him. He seemed to be in darkness and unable to move hand or foot. He was compressed in some way that he could not at first understand, and was being bumped and jolted in an extraordinary manner. It was some little time before he could understand the situation. He first remembered the fight with the junks, then he recalled the landing and burning the village; then, as his brain cleared, came the recollection of his start with Fothergill for the temple among the trees, his arrival there, and a loud report and flash of fire.

"I must have been knocked down and stunned," he said to himself, "and I suppose I am a prisoner now to these brutes, and one of them must be carrying me on his back."

Yes, he could understand it all now. His hands and his feet were tied, ropes were passed round his body in every direction, and he was fastened back to back upon the shoulders of a Chinaman. Percy remembered the tales he had heard of the imprisonment and torture of those who fell into the hands of the Chinese, and he bitterly regretted

that he had not been killed instead of stunned in the surprise of the temple.

"It would have been just the same feeling," he said to himself, "and there would have been an end of it. Now, there is no saying what is going to happen. I wonder whether Jack was killed, and the sailors."

Presently there was a jabber of voices; the motion ceased. Percy could feel that the cords were being unwound, and he was dropped on to his feet; then the cloth was removed from his head, and he could look round.

A dozen Chinese, armed with matchlocks and bristling with swords and daggers, stood around, and among them, bound like himself and gagged by a piece of bamboo forced lengthways across his mouth and kept there with a string going round the back of the head, stood Fothergill. He was bleeding from several cuts in the head. Percy's heart gave a bound of joy at finding that he was not alone; then he tried to feel sorry that Jack had not escaped, but failed to do so, although he told himself that his comrade's presence would not in any way alleviate the fate which was certain to befall him. Still the thought of com-

panionship, even in wretchedness, and perhaps a vague hope that Jack, with his energy and spirit, might contrive some way for their escape, cheered him up.

As Percy, too, was gagged, no word could be exchanged by the midshipmen, but they nodded to each other. They were now put side by side and made to walk in the centre of their captors. On the way they passed through several villages, whose inhabitants poured out to gaze at the captives, but the men in charge of them were evidently not disposed to delay, as they passed through without a stop. At last they halted before two cottages standing by themselves, thrust the prisoners into a small room, removed their gags, and left them to themselves.

"Well, Percy, my boy, so they caught you too? I am awfully sorry. It was my fault for going with only two men into that temple, but as the village had been deserted and scarcely a man was found there, it never entered my mind that there might be a party in the temple."

"Of course not, Jack; it was a surprise altogether. I don't know anything about it, for I was knocked down, I suppose, just as we went in,

and the first thing I knew about it was that I was being carried on the back of one of those fellows. I thought it was awful at first, but I don't seem to mind so much now you are with me."

"It is a comfort to have someone to speak to," Jack said, "yet I wish you were not here, Percy; I can't do you any good, and I shall never cease blaming myself for having brought you into this scrape. I don't know much more about the affair than you do. The guns were fired so close to us that my face was scorched with one of them, and almost at the same instant I got a lick across my cheek with a sword. I had just time to hit at one of them, and then almost at the same moment I got two or three other blows, and down I went; they threw themselves on the top of me and tied and gagged me in no time. Then I was tied to a long bamboo, and two fellows put the ends on their shoulders and went off with me through the fields. Of course I was face downwards, and did not know you were with us till they stopped and loosed me from the bamboo and set me on my feet."

"But what are they going to do with us do you think, Jack?"

"I should say they are going to take us to Canton and claim a reward for our capture, and there I suppose they will cut off our heads or saw us in two, or put us to some other unpleasant kind of death. I expect they are discussing it now; do you hear what a jabber they are kicking up?"

Voices were indeed heard raised in angry altercation in the next room. After a time the din subsided and the conversation appeared to take a more amiable turn.

"I suppose they have settled it as far as they are concerned," Jack said; "anyhow, you may be quite sure they mean to make something out of us. If they hadn't they would have finished us at once, for they must have been furious at the destruction of their junks and village. As to the idea that mercy has anything to do with it, we may as well put it out of our minds. The Chinaman, at the best of times, has no feeling of pity in his nature, and after their defeat it is certain they would have killed us at once had they not hoped to do better by us. If they had been Indians I should have said they had carried us off to enjoy the satisfaction of torturing us, but I don't suppose it is that with them."

"Do you think there is any chance of our getting away?" Percy asked, after a pause.

"I should say not the least in the world, Percy. My hands are fastened so tight now that the ropes seem cutting into my wrists, and after they had set me on my feet and cut the cords of my legs I could scarcely stand at first, my feet were so numbed by the pressure. However, we must keep up our pluck. Possibly they may keep us at Canton for a bit, and if they do the squadron may arrive and fight its way past the forts and take the city before they have quite made up their minds as to what kind of death will be most appropriate to the occasion. I wonder what they are doing now? They seem to be chopping sticks."

"I wish they would give us some water," Percy said. "I am frightfully thirsty."

"And so am I, Percy; there is one comfort, they won't let us die of thirst, they could get no satisfaction out of our deaths now."

Two hours later some of the Chinese re-entered the room and led the captives outside, and the lads then saw what was the meaning of the noise they had heard. A cage had been manufactured

of strong bamboos. It was about four and a half feet long, four feet wide, and less than three feet high; above it was fastened two long bamboos. Two or three of the bars of the cage had been left open.

"My goodness! they never intend to put us in there," Percy exclaimed.

"That they do," Jack said. "They are going to carry us the rest of the way."

The cords which bound the prisoners' hands were now cut, and they were motioned to crawl into the cage. This they did; the bars were then put in their places and securely lashed. Four men went to the ends of the poles and lifted the cage upon their shoulders; two others took their places beside it, and one man, apparently the leader of the party, walked on ahead; the rest remained behind.

"I never quite realized what a fowl felt in a coop before," Jack said, "but if its sensations are at all like mine they must be decidedly unpleasant. It isn't high enough to sit upright in, it is nothing like long enough to lie down, and as to getting out one might as well think of flying. Do you know, Percy, I don't think they mean taking

us to Canton at all. I did not think of it before, but from the direction of the sun I feel sure that we cannot have been going that way. What they are up to I can't imagine."

In an hour they came to a large village. Here the cage was set down and the villagers closed round. They were, however, kept a short distance from the cage by the men in charge of it. Then a wooden platter was placed on the ground, and persons throwing a few copper coins into this were allowed to come near the cage.

"They are making a show of us!" Fothergill exclaimed. "That's what they are up to, you see if it isn't; they are going to travel up country to show the 'white devils' whom their valour has captured."

This was, indeed, the purpose of the pirates. At that time Europeans seldom ventured beyond the limits assigned to them in the two or three towns where they were permitted to trade, and few, indeed, of the country people had ever obtained a sight of the white barbarians of whose doings they had so frequently heard. Consequently a small crowd soon gathered round the cage, eyeing the captives with the same interest

they would have felt as to unknown and dangerous beasts; they laughed and joked, passed remarks upon them, and even poked them with sticks. Fothergill, furious at this treatment, caught one of the sticks, and wrenching it from the hands of the Chinaman, tried to strike at him through the bars, a proceeding which excited shouts of laughter from the bystanders.

"I think, Jack," Percy said, "it will be best to try and keep our tempers and not to seem to mind what they do to us, then if they find they can't get any fun out of us they will soon leave us alone."

"Of course, that's the best plan," Fothergill agreed, "but it's not so easy to follow. That fellow very nearly poked out my eye with his stick, and no one's going to stand that if he can help it."

It was some hours before the curiosity of the village was satisfied. When all had paid who were likely to do so, the guards broke up their circle, and leaving two of their number at the cage to see that no actual harm was caused to their prisoners, the rest went off to a refreshment house. The place of the

elders was now taken by the boys and children of the village, who crowded round the cage, prodded the prisoners with sticks, and, putting their hands through the bars, pulled their ears and hair. This amusement, however, was brought to an abrupt conclusion by Fothergill suddenly seizing the wrist of a big boy and pulling his arm through the cage until his face was against the bars; then he proceeded to punch him until the guard, coming to his rescue, poked Fothergill with his stick until he released his hold.

The punishment of their comrade excited neither anger nor resentment among the other boys, who yelled with delight at his discomfiture, but it made them more careful in approaching the cage, and though they continued to poke the prisoners with sticks they did not venture again to thrust a hand through the bars. At sunset the guards again came round, lifted the cage and carried it into a shed. A platter of dirty rice and a jug of water were put into the cage; two of the men lighted their long pipes and sat down on guard beside it, and, the doors being closed, the captives were left in peace.

“If this sort of thing is to go on, as I suppose

it is," Fothergill said, "the sooner they cut off our heads the better."

"It is very bad, Jack. I am sore all over with those probes from their sharp sticks."

"I don't care for the pain, Percy, so much as the humiliation of the thing. To be stared at and poked at as if we were wild beasts by these curs, when with half a dozen of our men we could send a hundred of them scampering, I feel as if I could choke with rage."

"You had better try and eat some of this rice, Jack. It is beastly, but I daresay we shall get no more until to-morrow night, and we must keep up our strength if we can. At any rate, the water is not bad, that's a comfort."

"No thanks to them," Jack growled. "If there had been any bad water in the neighbourhood they would have given it to us."

For six weeks the sufferings of the prisoners continued. Their captors avoided towns where the authorities would probably at once have taken the prisoners out of their hands. No one would have recognized the two captives as the midshipmen of the *Perseus*; their clothes were in rags—torn to pieces by the thrusts of the sharp-pointed

bamboos, to which they had daily been subjected—the bad food, the cramped position, and the misery which they suffered had worn both lads to skeletons; their hair was matted with filth, their faces begrimed with dirt. Percy was so weak that he felt he could not stand. Fothergill, being three years older, was less exhausted, but he knew that he, too, could not support his sufferings for many days longer. Their bodies were covered with sores, and try as they would they were able to catch only a few minutes' sleep at a time, so much did the bamboo bars hurt their wasted limbs.

They seldom exchanged a word during the daytime, suffering in silence the persecutions to which they were exposed, but at night they talked over their homes and friends in England, and their comrades on board ship, seldom saying a word as to their present position. They were now in a hilly country, but had not the least idea of the direction in which it lay from Canton or its distance from the coast.

One evening Jack said to his companion, "I think it's nearly all over now, Percy. The last two days we have made longer journeys, and

have not stopped at any of the smaller villages we passed through. I fancy our guards must see that we can't last much longer, and are taking us down to some town to hand us over to the authorities and get their reward for us."

"I hope it is so, Jack; the sooner the better. Not that it makes much difference now to me, for I do not think I can stand many more days of it."

"I am afraid I am tougher than you, Percy, and shall take longer to kill, so I hope with all my heart that I may be right, and that they may be going to give us up to the authorities."

The next evening they stopped at a large place, and were subjected to the usual persecution; this, however, was now less prolonged than during the early days of their captivity, for they had now no longer strength or spirits to resent their treatment, and as no fun was to be obtained from passive victims, even the village boys soon ceased to find any amusement in tormenting them.

When most of their visitors had left them, an elderly Chinaman approached the side of the cage. He spoke to their guards and looked at them attentively for some minutes, then he said in pigeon English, "You officer men?"

"Yes!" Jack exclaimed, starting at the sound of the English words, the first they had heard spoken since their captivity. "Yes, we are officers of the *Perseus*."

"Me speeke English velly well," the Chinaman said; "me pilot-man many years on Canton river. How you get here?"

"We were attacking some piratical junks, and landed to destroy the village where the people were firing on us. We entered a place full of pirates, and were knocked down and taken prisoners, and carried away up the country; that is six weeks ago, and you see what we are now."

"Pirate men velly bad," the Chinaman said; "plunder many junk on river and kill crew. Me muchee hate them."

"Can you do anything for us?" Jack asked. "You will be well rewarded if you could manage to get us free."

The man shook his head.

"Me no see what can do, me stranger here; come to stay with wifey; people no do what me ask them. English ships attack Canton, much fight and take town, people all hate English."

Bad country dis. People in one village fight against another. Velly bad men here."

"How far is Canton away?" Jack asked. "Could you not send down to tell the English we are here?"

"Fourteen days' journey off," the man said; "no see how can do anything."

"Well," Jack said, "when you get back again to Canton let our people know what has been the end of us; we shall not last much longer."

"All light," the man said, "will see what me can do. Muchee think to-night!" And after saying a few words to the guards, who had been regarding this conversation with an air of surprise, the Chinaman retired.

The guards had for some time abandoned the precaution of sitting up at night by the cage, convinced that their captives had no longer strength to attempt to break through its fastenings or to drag themselves many yards away if they could do so. They therefore left it standing in the open, and, wrapping themselves in their thickly-wadded coats, for the nights were cold, lay down by the side of the cage.

The coolness of the nights had, indeed, assisted

to keep the two prisoners alive. During the day the sun was excessively hot, and the crowd of visitors round the cage impeded the circulation of the air and added to their sufferings. It was true that the cold at night frequently prevented them from sleeping, but it acted as a tonic and braced them up.

“What did he mean about the villages attacking each other?” Percy asked.

“I have heard,” Jack replied, “that in some parts of China things are very much the same as they used to be in the highlands of Scotland. There is no law or order. The different villages are like clans, and wage war on each other. Sometimes the Government sends a number of troops, who put the thing down for a time, chop off a good many heads, and then march away, and the whole work begins again as soon as their backs are turned.”

That night the uneasy slumber of the lads was disturbed by a sudden firing; shouts and yells were heard, and the firing redoubled.

“The village is attacked,” Jack said. “I noticed that, like some other places we have come into lately, there is a strong earthen wall round it,



with gates. Well, there is one comfort—it does not make much difference to us which side wins.”

The guards at the first alarm leapt to their feet, caught up their matchlocks, and ran to aid in the defence of the wall. Two minutes later a man ran up to the cage.

“All lightee,” he said; “just what me hopee.”

With his knife he cut the tough withes that held the bamboos in their places, and pulled out three of the bars.

“Come along,” he said; “no time to lose.”

Jack scrambled out, but in trying to stand upright gave a sharp exclamation of pain. Percy crawled out more slowly; he tried to stand up, but could not. The Chinaman caught him up and threw him on his shoulder.

“Come along quickee,” he said to Jack; “if takee village, kill evely one.” He set off at a run. Jack followed as fast as he could, groaning at every step from the pain the movement caused to his bruised body.

They went to the side of the village opposite to that at which the attack was going on. They met no one on the way, the inhabitants having all rushed to the other side to repel the attack.

They stopped at a small gate in the wall, the Chinaman drew back the bolts and opened it, and they passed out into the country. For an hour they kept on. By the end of that time Jack could scarcely drag his limbs along. The Chinaman halted at length in a clump of trees surrounded by a thick undergrowth.

"Allee safee here," he said, "no searchee so far; here food;" and he produced from a wallet a cold chicken and some boiled rice, and unslung from his shoulder a gourd filled with cold tea.

"Me go back now, see what happen. To-morrow nightee come again—bringee more food." And without another word went off at a rapid pace.

Jack moistened his lips with the tea, and then turned to his companion. Percy had not spoken a word since he had been released from the cage, and had been insensible during the greater part of his journey. Jack poured some cold tea between his lips.

"Cheer up, Percy, old boy, we are free now, and with luck and that good fellow's help we will work our way down to Canton yet."

"I shall never get down there; you may," Percy said feebly.

"Oh, nonsense, you will pick up strength like a steam-engine now. Here, let me prop you against this tree. That's better. Now drink a drop of this tea; it's like nectar after that filthy water we have been drinking. Now you will feel better. Now you must try and eat a little of this chicken and rice. Oh, nonsense, you have got to do it. I am not going to let you give way when our trouble is just over. Think of your people at home, Percy, and make an effort, for their sakes. Good heavens! now I think of it, it must be Christmas morning. We were caught on the 2nd and we have been just twenty-two days on show. I am sure that it must be past twelve o'clock, and it is Christmas-day. It is a good omen, Percy. This food isn't like roast beef and plum-pudding, but it's not to be despised, I can tell you. Come, fire away, that's a good fellow."

Percy made an effort and ate a few mouthfuls of rice and chicken, then he took another draught of tea, and lay down, and was almost immediately asleep.

Jack ate his food slowly and contentedly till he finished half the supply, then he, too, lay down, and, after a short but hearty thanksgiving for

his escape from a slow and lingering death, he, too, fell off to sleep. The sun was rising when he woke, being aroused by a slight movement on the part of Percy; he opened his eyes and sat up.

"Well, Percy, how do you feel this morning?" he asked cheerily.

"I feel too weak to move," Percy replied languidly.

"Oh, you will be all right when you have sat up and eaten breakfast," Jack said. "Here you are; here is a wing for you, and this rice is as white as snow, and the tea is first rate. I thought last night after I lay down that I heard a murmur of water, so after we have had breakfast I will look about and see if I can find it. We should feel like new men after a wash. You look awful, and I am sure I am just as bad."

The thought of a wash inspirited Percy far more than that of eating, and he sat up and made a great effort to do justice to breakfast. He succeeded much better than he had done the night before, and Jack, although he pretended to grumble, was satisfied with his companion's progress, and finished off the rest of the food. Then he set out to search for water. He had not very far

to go; a tiny stream, a few inches wide and two or three inches deep, ran through the wood from the higher ground. After throwing himself down and taking a drink, he hurried back to Percy.

"It is all right, Percy, I have found it. We can wash to our hearts' content; think of that, lad."

Percy could hardly stand, but he made an effort, and Jack half carried him to the streamlet. There the lads spent hours. First they bathed their heads and hands, and then, stripping, lay down in the stream and allowed it to flow over them, then they rubbed themselves with handfuls of leaves dipped in the water, and when they at last put on their rags again felt like new men. Percy was able to walk back to the spot they had quitted with the assistance only of Jack's arm. The latter, feeling that his breakfast had by no means appeased his hunger, now started for a search through the wood, and presently returned to Percy laden with nuts and berries.

"The nuts are sure to be all right; I expect the berries are too. I have certainly seen some like them in native markets, and I think it will be quite safe to risk it."

The rest of the day was spent in picking nuts and eating them. Then they sat down and waited for the arrival of their friend. He came two hours after nightfall with a wallet stored with provisions, and told them that he had regained the village unobserved. The attack had been repulsed, but with severe loss to the defenders as well as the assailants; two of their guards had been among the killed. The others had made a great clamour over the escape of the prisoners, and had made a close search throughout the village and immediately round it, for they were convinced that their captives had not had the strength to go any distance. He thought, however, that although they had professed the greatest indignation, and had offered many threats as to the vengeance that Government would take upon the village, one of whose inhabitants, at least, must have aided in the evasion of the prisoners, they would not trouble themselves any further in the matter. They had already reaped a rich harvest from the exhibition, and would divide among themselves the share of their late comrades; nor was it at all improbable that if they were to report the matter to the authorities they would

themselves get into serious trouble for not having handed over the prisoners immediately after their capture.

For a fortnight the pilot nursed and fed the two midshipmen. He had already provided them with native clothes, so that if by chance any villagers should catch sight of them they would not recognize them as the escaped white men. At the end of that time both the lads had almost recovered from the effects of their sufferings. Jack, indeed, had picked up from the first, but Percy for some days continued so weak and ill that Jack had feared that he was going to have an attack of fever of some kind. His companion's cheery and hopeful chat did as much good for Percy as the nourishing food with which their friend supplied them, and at the end of the fortnight he declared that he felt sufficiently strong to attempt to make his way down to the coast.

The pilot acted as their guide. When they inquired about his wife, he told them carelessly that she would remain with her kinsfolk, and would travel on to Canton and join him there when she found an opportunity. The journey was accomplished at night, by very short stages

at first, but by increasing distances as Percy gained strength. During the daytime the lads lay hid in woods or jungles, while their companion went into the village and purchased food. They struck the river many miles above Canton, and the pilot, going down first to a village on its banks, bargained for a boat to take him and two women down to the city.

The lads went on board at night and took their places in the little cabin formed of bamboos and covered with mats in the stern of the boat, and remained thus sheltered not only from the view of people in boats passing up or down the stream, but from the eyes of their own boatmen.

After two days' journey down the river without incident, they arrived off Canton, where the British fleet was still lying while negotiations for peace were being carried on with the authorities at Peking. Peeping out between the mats, the lads caught sight of the English warships, and, knowing that there was now no danger, they dashed out of the cabin, to the surprise of the native boatmen, and shouted and waved their arms to the distant ships.

In ten minutes they were alongside the *Perseus*,

when they were hailed as if restored from the dead. The pilot was very handsomely rewarded by the English authorities for his kindness to the prisoners, and was highly satisfied with the result of his proceedings, which more than doubled the little capital with which he had retired from business. Jack Fothergill and Percy Adcock declare that they have never since eaten chicken without thinking of their Christmas fare on the morning of their escape from the hands of the Chinese pirates.

THE END.

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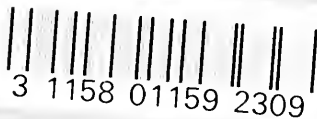
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